

Participation in SEARCH Program Proves Worthwhile for Whiteside Community Health Clinic

By Ruth Arway, SEARCH Coordinator, IPHCA



Bill Yemm, D.D.S. (standing), dental director and SEARCH preceptor, and Brandon Klein, D.D.S., a newly hired dentist who completing a SEARCH clinical rotation at Whiteside Community Health Clinic, utilize the center's new digital x-ray machine for patient education and diagnosis.

As an active participant in the Illinois Student/Resident Experiences and Rotations in Community Health (SEARCH) program, the Whiteside Community Health Clinic (a division of the Whiteside County Health Department) arranged training rotations for six SEARCH students throughout 2010. Students included four dental students, a nurse practitioner student, and a behavioral health student who is pursuing a degree in social work.

Whiteside Community Health Clinic (WCHC) is located about 120 miles west of Chicago, and its rural setting provides a valuable opportunity for students from a variety of disciplines to develop their skills and work as a member of a health care team that is addressing the needs of an underserved population.

WCHC is committed at all levels to the value of training health professional students in the Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) setting. The clinic recognizes the potential for addressing primary care workforce needs through recruitment and participation in training and precepting students, as well as what engagement in these activities does to promote satisfaction among existing clinicians. In addition, through

participation in SEARCH, WCHC receives compensation that helps cover financial costs for training, as well as an annual educational grant.

WCHC has recently experienced some significant positive outcomes from their commitment, time and efforts to train students.

WCHC Welcomes New Clinician Following SEARCH Rotation

In May 2010, WCHC hired Brandon Klein, D.D.S., who had just completed a SEARCH clinical rotation there as a student at UIC Dental School.

Once hired, Dr. Klein applied for (and is currently receiving) loan repayment through the Illinois Department of Public Health. He notes that his transition from student to dentist has been very smooth and he finds his work at WCHC to be stimulating, as it offers variety and complexity in the cases that he sees.

"My clinical rotation at WCHC and my current experience as a new dentist has provided great exposure to all aspects of general dentistry. In addition, the clinic sees many patients who are taking extensive medications, which provides an additional opportunity to

develop knowledge and skills related to pharmacology." The majority of patients are Medicaid recipients under 21, but the clinic also treats a growing number of adult patients. Dr. Klein has enjoyed becoming more familiar with patients and the ability to see them through to the completion of their treatment plans. In addition, the clinic also employs dental assistants, and he appreciated having an opportunity to train with an assistant while doing his SEARCH rotation. Although Dr. Klein grew up in Amboy, Illinois—just 30 miles from the Whiteside Community Health Clinic—he did not know about the clinic before pursuing his clinical rotation.

Dr. Klein believes the most challenging aspect of his work is seeing adolescent patients who present with extensive oral health needs – a hint at the severe needs of the population in the area and the critical role of WCHC in helping to overcome barriers to oral health services. In addition, these patients face significant difficulties in accessing specialty care and oral surgery due to financial barriers and a lack of providers in the area.

Despite these challenges, Dr. Klein finds that working within the FQHC setting is very rewarding, primarily because he can make a positive impact on patients who present with emergencies. "With the ability to treat all patients regardless of their financial means, patients are never turned away and always leave with an immediate solution," Klein said. He also notes the value of training and working in an environment that is well managed, highly efficient, and provides high quality patient care. "As far as public health dentistry is concerned, you can't beat Whiteside Community Health Clinic. It is an excellent clinic," said Dr. Klein.

WCHC Receives Glowing Reviews From Dental Students

Dr. Klein and his UIC classmate, Dr. Logan Bell, who also completed a SEARCH clinical rotation at WCHC, shared their experiences with other UIC dental students who, in turn, have requested rotations at the clinic. Both talk very highly of their experiences with Dr. William Yemm who was their preceptor during their SEARCH rotation.

"I had an amazing experience during my rotation," said Dr. Bell, who is currently pursuing a dental residency program.

"Dr. Yemm is very enthusiastic about teaching which made my rotation more enjoyable. He was always willing to answer questions when I was having trouble with a procedure or just curious about something." Bell also noted that the staff was extremely pleasant to work with and they all seem to enjoy their jobs.

SEARCH Student Helps WCHD Expand Services to Patients with Developmental Disabilities

In summer 2010, Rosa Leland, an APN student from the Frontier School of Midwifery and Family Nursing, Family Nurse Practitioner Program in Lexington, Kentucky, conducted a SEARCH rotation at WCHC. Leland made significant contributions to the organization which included helping the center expand services to patients with developmental disabilities – a critical need in the counties that WCHC serves.

Lynne Schweppe, director of operations, directed Rosa in writing a proposal for WCHC and partnering agencies for the development of a model to provide comprehensive primary care services to 300 individuals with developmental disabilities from Whiteside and Lee counties. In September 2010, the proposal was funded by the Illinois Council on Developmental Disabilities which is the state agency that focuses on a wide range of programs to help improve opportunities for people with developmental disabilities, including education, employment, transportation, community living and health care.

Through the initiative, WCHC is partnering with Kreider Services, Inc. and Self-Help Enterprises, Inc. to address the many challenges that patients with developmental disabilities and their families face in receiving quality primary health care. Funding provided through the grant will be used to develop a model that will address and overcome barriers, such as, 1) Lack of knowledge and training of health care providers on the needs of persons with developmental disabilities, including biases, lack of sensitivity and communications difficulties; 2) Access issues, such as inadequate insurance coverage, lack of health care providers that accept public aid, and lack of knowledge about insurance coverage and where to go for health care services; 3) Transportation

and mobility issues; and 4) Sensory impairment and behavioral issues.

Since October 2010, activities of the initiative have included staff training; development of new marketing materials to promote customer awareness of available services; outreach, including clinic tours, health fairs and smoking cessation classes; development of tools for behavioral change (focusing on patient self-care priorities and health care decision making); and case management to assure access and continuity of care for primary and specialty health care services. Two staff will also be trained in the evidence-based Chronic Disease Self-Management Program (CDSMP) to offer a class to empower individuals for self-care.

According to Cindy Bonheur, RN, case manager, "This pilot is really an opportunity to expand our learning and bridge the gaps of access that are sometimes experienced by those with developmental disabilities. As we help patients navigate through some of the obstacles they experience, it is our hope that we can help them overcome barriers to quality health care."

WCHC To Welcome New SEARCH Students

In the coming weeks, WCHD will be welcoming some new SEARCH students for dental clinical rotations through UIC. These dental students will be participating in the initiation of a new digital imaging and electronic patient education system, as well as electronic dental records (EDRs). The new EDR system will be completely integrated with the medical clinic once its electronic medical records (EMR) goes live in July.

"Students who are doing clinical rotations are especially resourceful when it comes to sharing the latest research and techniques," said Beth Fiorini, executive director/public health administrator of WCHC. "Investing time in their education is worth it when it comes to the contribution they pay forward, not only to our center but to future public health collaborations."

Lynn Schweppe adds, "The SEARCH program is one of our best tools for engaging future providers in our mission to provide quality health care for the underserved. Even the smallest

contribution can make a difference in ensuring awareness of community health center quality, as well as recruitment of future providers."

Schweppe is an active member of the Illinois SEARCH Advisory Committee that includes faculty at Illinois health professions training programs, clinical and executive staff at community health centers, and government and other specialized entities relevant to the program. The advisory committee meets semi-annually to make recommendations for program organization, data collection, evaluation, curriculum and new initiatives.

WCHC is also participating in other Illinois SEARCH activities this spring and summer. Schweppe will be among a small panel of presenters at the 2011 Illinois SEARCH Mentoring Reception for Students and Residents on April 27 at the IPHCA office in Springfield. In addition, WCHC is partnering with the Illinois SEARCH Program to offer the 2011 SEARCH Summer Pre-Clinical Curriculum and will be hosting students through site visits, shadowing and pre-clinical rotations.

For more information about the Illinois SEARCH Program, contact Ruth Arway, SEARCH coordinator at rarway@iphca.org or (312) 692-3030. ■